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ABSTRACT

The University of Illinois' Language Learning Laboratory began the process of developing its own videotape materials in 1979 with limited resources. Interest grew gradually among faculty and the graduate teaching staff, who generally designed and produced their own materials and then shared them with colleagues. A wide variety of tapes has been produced, including video to accompany a teacher-written text, modules based on specific language functions, dialogs for listening comprehension, a tape about francophone Africa using the accents and performances of foreign graduate students, special lesson materials, student-produced English as a second language materials, a cabaret performance, class skits, taped lectures, and special event tapes. Other projects are planned, including tapes of native French speakers demonstrating functional language uses and an interactive computer-videotape lesson. The program has shown that self-produced tapes add interest and spontaneity to classroom language learning, can be individualized, can be produced inexpensively, are easily and productively improvised, may be used by different teachers for different purposes, may be made more authentic with native speakers, can save materials research time, and can be edited and used in any way desired. (MSE)

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SELF-PRODUCED VIDEO TAPES IN SECOND LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Junetta B. Gillespie[1]

The advantages of self-produced video tapes for language teaching are discussed, as are some techniques for producing useful materials at low cost--and without going abroad.

Perhaps because of a strong tradition of developing computer-assisted instruction, the Language Learning Laboratory of the University of Illinois has also placed a strong emphasis on development of our own video materials, as opposed to acquiring and utilizing available tapes. When our present site in the Foreign Languages Building was opened in the early 1970s, it came complete with a small studio and control room, and shortly thereafter, a film chain for transferring 16mm film and 35mm slides and a Umatic editing system were installed.

For a time, the studio was shared with another campus unit, and the Lab's video operation was handled by our Technical Division. In 1979, a committee was established to assess the operation and its potential, and at the recommendation of this group, a professional staff position of Video Coordinator was established. This is where I entered the picture (figuratively speaking) and many of our very talented faculty, teaching staff, and students began to enter the picture (literally).

As Video Coordinator, I was charged with the responsibility of putting our facilities to use on behalf of second language learning. Initially, I wondered what essential purpose video might serve in teaching second languages, and suffered from occasional envy of my counterparts in Veterinary Medicine and Chemistry for what seemed to me the relatively obvious and compelling role for the medium in teaching their disciplines. I wondered how I would go about producing things in languages I didn't understand, with no production budgets, and in a facility which allowed for only modest production styles. Furthermore, even if we had field equipment, how could we serve foreign languages among the cornfields and neocolonial facades of our campus and community?

In order to inspire others, I had to convince myself; to this end, I did a literature search. While I found some excellent reports of excellent projects, most of them dated back to the days of broadcast TV, poor quality and expensive reproduction systems, user unfriendly playback systems, the "teacher shortage", and a consequent mind set that televised instruction had to be a "whole-job" enterprise. Productions had to be "professional" and of "broadcast quality"; fully scripted; with elaborate, realistic sets; and every production had to be developed by a large and well-paid team as part of an extensive research project (usually, of course, well-funded by some benevolent foundation or government agency).

I found, however, that some pioneers had, in fact, been applying the medium in creative and technologically up-to-date ways (cf. Berwald 1976, Crouse and Noll 1980, Ecklund and Wiese 1981, and Keilstrup 1980). Other reports of interest described teaching methodologies and techniques in which it seemed video, though it had not been utilized, might well have assumed a vital and labor saving role (cf. Asher 1969; Elkins, Kalivoda, and Morain 1972). Other sources (Brown 1980, Corder 1966, Cornfield 1966, and Morain 1978) helped to relate the potential of the medium to prevailing trends in language teaching and to the use of visual materials in the classroom.[2]

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2. For a fuller discussion, see Gillespie 1981.

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Finally, consideration of the importance of non-verbal communication led one toward the inescapable common sense observation that yes, we do always *see* people in a context as they speak to us or to each other; and that kinesics and proxemics provide many essential clues not only to emotional tone, but also to socially appropriate and acceptable communicative behaviors.

Gradually, faculty, teaching associates, and teaching assistants began appearing with ideas for projects utilizing the medium. These pioneering types had fairly firm visions already of what the medium could do to enhance their classroom teaching or curricula and some had already produced materials for classroom use. Our standard working method for production began to evolve. The instructor/designer of the materials acts as producer, rounding up "talent" (almost always unpaid) from among colleagues and students; writing scripts (or structuring situations); bringing in the more esoteric props not available in our studio; and often producing the necessary title cards and graphics. After a "script conference" with the producer, I round up a crew, put up scenery, set the lights, and do a shot plan.

Once these early projects were finished, their creators shared their materials by demonstrating them for colleagues in teacher training classes or colloquia. In addition to "word of mouth" endorsements, major projects were written up in our LLL newsletter, *Notes from Underground*. This set other teachers thinking about things they could do with video. All in all, an incredible amount of time and expertise has been donated--without even any professional rewards that I am aware of beyond some opportunities to demonstrate materials at conferences--to producing video materials in support of classroom language learning.

Mostly we have worked with no budget (but with the tremendous luxury of free studio time). Our equipment, with the exception of our new editing system, passed its heyday early in my tenure. Rehearsal time is minimal, and the cast tend to vanish after an hour or two because of commitments to teach or attend seminars. Our productions do not look like CBS or PBS; they are, simply, the best we can do with the time, talent, and equipment we have available. Not all of them have been "hits", but a fairly large proportion of the tapes we have produced have been used again and again through the years, not only by the producer/teacher, but by colleagues both here and, in several cases, at other campuses.

Here are a few examples showing the range of materials we have produced: Professor Seiichi Makino, with the aid of teaching assistants in the Japanese language program and other volunteers from the campus and community, produced 20 lessons, some with several scenes, to accompany a text he has written for first-year Japanese. The video-taped segments provide a cultural context for the lexical content of the discourse. These video "lessons" form a continuing story with a plot line revolving about four chief characters--two Japanese students and two American students. The first 10 lessons take place at a university in the U.S. where all four are studying; the second 10, in various "Japanese" settings, as one of the U.S. students goes to live with a Japanese host family. All of the scenes were taped in our studio during two hour periods on Friday afternoons during one semester; they were fully scripted; and directed from a shot plan based on an interlinear English translation of the script.

In our attempts to simulate authentic settings in a small studio setting and with no budget for props, we arrived at a production style I call "semi-realism" which has reappeared in much of our work. By "semi-realism" I mean something halfway between realism and pantomime, in which we attempt to provide enough of a setting for the viewer to be able to contextualize the event in time and space and in terms of the activities being carried on. A chair is a chair, and a floor cushion a floor cushion, even though they might not be "authentic" in every case. We feel our students are intelligent enough to extrapolate from "suggested" settings to "real" settings should they be fortunate enough to study or live in the country whose culture is being depicted. Not that we wouldn't prefer real settings, but if we held out for them we could not have produced the library of tapes we have, and students would not have benefited from them, as I assume they have, since the tapes are used over and over through the years.

Tony Silva, formerly a Teaching Associate in the University of Illinois Intensive English Institute, produced several series of tapes in our studio as part of carefully designed modules centering on various language functions (Silva 1983). Tony's work, too, has had a lasting influence on our production styles. He has insisted on the use of a single camera (a style we find is rather controversial) because this allows for maximum spontaneity, particularly in terms of non-verbal behaviors, on the part of his "talent". Instead of a script, Tony and the on-camera participants, who were usually selected from among his teaching colleagues in IEI or from among graduate students in ESL, worked out "scenes" illustrating variations of particular language functions, including differences in status and register and encounters that are "successful" or "unsuccessful" in achieving their communicative goals. The video director works from a prediction on the part of the "talent" as to their movements through space, and from an "outcue" which is, at least in paraphrase, agreed by all to represent the end of the encounter being taped.

Kristin Lems, with Tony Silva, has produced similar dialogs for listening comprehension. *Listening in Everyday Situations* uses multiple cameras, closeups, and a somewhat higher degree of "realism" in props and sets. Lems and Silva selected the situations portrayed in this series by asking students in ESL classes what situations they most needed to master linguistically; they chose "telling a joke", "renting an apartment", "getting a bank loan", "handling an insult", and "narration". Kristin also brought a pair of very delightful grandparents into the studio one Saturday to tell stories, and to listen to stories; these tapes not only provide practice in listening comprehension, but provide students with a model for inter-generational dialogues in English.

Sévérine Arlabosse, who participated in our French Department's graduate student exchange program with the University of Dakar, with the cooperation of University of Illinois graduate students from several francophone African countries has produced a video tape entitled *L'Afrique en français* which includes dialogues, lectures with slides, interviews, and readings. These tapes benefited from the wealth of information available from participants and from the presentation of variants of French accents and forms of expression not readily available to many U.S. students. I have to admit this series contains the only piece of video tape produced under my direction of which I have no technical criticisms, and which in fact is one of my favorite video tapes of all time--that in which Yabou Sambe recites the poem "Afrique" by David Diop, a reading of that text which never fails to send chills up my spine (the phenomenon Emily Dickinson rightly termed the only true test of poetry).

Professor Alice C. Omaggio, who coordinates our elementary and intermediate French courses, and several teaching assistants in these courses have produced a number of tapes designed to go with chapters of the text she co-authored, *Rendez-vous* (Muyskens et al. 1982). Special lesson materials have been prepared to accompany most of these tapes, which include scenes in post offices, restaurants, clothing stores, banks, airports, hotels and other settings. Among these are "survival skills" tapes produced by Josie Ponterio, now at St. Lawrence University. Josie Ponterio has also produced two tapes of "arguments"--one on politics and one about women's liberation. We have found extraordinary acting talent two floors above us in our French Department, including exchange assistants from France, and other graduate students. Professor Fernand Marty and Mme Denise Guback may be singled out for having donated their time to appear in a number of tapes; I suspect it would be difficult to find more talented (and linguistically knowledgeable) performers anywhere at any price.

Our ESL teacher training course, taught by Pearl Goodman, comes into our studio every semester for an orientation session about our video facilities and services and some "hands-on" experiences with cameras.[3] The orientation has paid off handsomely in terms of some outstanding tapes produced by teams of students from the class for use in their "practice lessons"; these include a toothpaste commercial (designed to illustrate the use of superlatives), mimes (for performatives), cooking demonstrations, and even a fairly convincing "shower scene" (to lead into a lesson on notetaking) where we used rain sound effects and hung a shower curtain from a string stretched

3. Readers are referred to Goodman's article in this issue of *Studies in Language Learning*, which is pertinent to all second language teacher training, not just ESL.

between two pieces of scenery. Fine acting completed the illusion. Several of the students participating in these video tapes have gone on to produce master's projects making significant use of the medium. For example, Peggy Qureshi is currently developing a set of listening comprehension modules based on specially prepared and video-taped lectures by distinguished University faculty members. The lectures deal with aspects of the various disciplines involved as they related to life and education in the United States.

Among many other tapes produced locally and used in our classes have been a "French Cabaret" produced by French teaching assistants, which included songs and sketches and was taped during the performance; *Japanese in a Day*, situational sketches again produced by Professor Makino; and *Spanish for Agricultural Purposes* by Professor Mainous (discussed in this issue).

Another major project for 1985-86 is production of a series of video segments showing native French speakers in a variety of carefully structured situations, most of them demonstrating a functional use of language such as inviting, greeting, introducing, telephoning, ordering in a restaurant, and checking into a hotel. These tapes are especially designed to accompany the second edition of the text *Rendez-vous* (Muysken et al. forthcoming) and the publisher of this text is subsidizing our out-of-pocket production costs. The tapes, however, should be useful in other classroom contexts and at other levels. Professor Alice C. Omaggio, co-author of the text, is supervising pedagogical aspects of the project.

The LLL Video Labs are also at work on an ongoing project involving development of an interactive computer/video-tape pilot lesson utilizing tapes of various models for greeting and getting acquainted in French based on situation and participant status. As in the case of Tony Silva's modules, the "Scenes" were developed through improvisation. These lessons begin with the video tapes and allow the student to approach toward comprehension and emulation of authentic dialog through a variety of media (sound and sight; sight only; sound only; text with sound; and text only.) Lesson modules centering around each variation of the basic situation will include vocabulary and idioms, grammar, cultural context, and non-verbal communication. Tapes were shot with one camera, but with separate speech-by-speech closeups of the basic dialog for utilization by students as models for pronunciation, as keys for generating appropriate responses, or simply as slowed-down versions to aid beginning students with comprehension. The "generic" tapes are also utilized "as is" for classroom playback. Eventually we hope to produce more tapes presenting models for participants of unequal status, as well as similar treatment of other language functions. We have recently acquired a new interface which will allow us to "window" computer text and graphics on the same screen with video tapes; this technology, which syncs composite and RGB signals, will allow for a more elegant presentation of lesson materials, as well as opening up new possibilities for presenting those materials.

These self-produced video tapes are cited as examples of what can be done with (1) little or no production budget; (2) a minimum of props and sets; and (3) a minimum of time. Most of these productions could have been done fairly effectively with a single camera and recorder, though multiple cameras move us closer to what most would regard as professionalism and the potential for closeups and editing do allow for more interesting and "professional" tapes.

I have not included any mention of numerous other forms of self-produced tapes including class skits (wonderful for generating language practice and for "breaking the ice" by getting students working together in informal task-oriented ways often involving a lot of laughter); taping lectures, so that they can be available in future semesters; taping interviews with distinguished visitors; and taping special events (such as an evening of French farces produced by our French Department). All are useful and easy and inexpensive to produce.

The fruits of this work over the year, in terms of my own sense of the advantages of producing your own tapes, can be summarized in the following observations:

1. Self-produced tapes more than make up in liveliness and spontaneity and interest for what they may lack in terms of polished production. It is just plain lots of fun to see your own teacher or TAs or classmates performing on camera.
2. Producing your own tapes allows you to include exactly what you, as the teacher, want to include, and at the level proper for your own students and teaching goals.
3. Self-produced video tapes need not be expensive. It's nice to have a studio, but if you don't, useful tapes can still be made with a single camera and consumer-style equipment. Careful planning of shots and in-camera editing can help to compensate for lack of editing equipment.
4. Where it is appropriate to pedagogical purposes, do consider the possibility of improvised, as opposed to scripted, materials. The advantages of this approach are that amateur "talent" can usually be much more convincing while improvising than while reciting memorized scripts; studio and taping time is much less because fewer retakes due to forgotten lines will be necessary; and the discourse will tend to be much more natural. Scenes should, however, be carefully structured, not only with regard to situational aspects, but also to the point of providing a history of the relationship between the participants and a description of their respective statuses.
5. Video tape is such a rich medium that different teachers may use the same piece of tape in many different ways and at different levels, thereby making it "their own", and making the low-cost productions highly cost effective.
6. If you can find talent who are poised and fluent, you can provide much more authentic models of "real" discourse than you will find in available tape. Movies and TV dramas are scripted and acted, and most plots and situations (one hopes) tend to bear relatively little resemblance to real life.
7. In some cases, it may be quicker to produce your own tape than to find suitable available tape, a process that may necessitate hours of searching and editing.
8. Making your own tapes allows you to use them as you wish, in, for example, computer/video lessons. You can also put them on community public access cable or campus cable and make copies for students or for colleagues at other institutions. (Be sure to get appropriate releases from all your on-camera talent.) When we have tried to get permission to use commercial film segments, outrageous prices have been quoted. If one is going to go to the trouble of developing lesson materials around video tape, using self-produced tapes insures that you can edit and use the tapes in any desired way, and share them with others.

A number of institutions are exchanging self-produced tapes on an informal basis. The time seems ripe for institutionalizing some sort of centralized computer catalog of such tapes so as to facilitate inter-institutional sharing. In the meantime, I predict that, at least at our institution, self-produced tapes will remain an important factor even as our supply of available tapes from abroad continues to increase.

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